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ABSTRACT

The problems of urban public schools and current reform efforts are examined in this issue of "FOCUS," a publication of the Educational Testing Service. Declining support from parents and teachers, budget cuts, declining enrollment and deficiencies in student performance in mathematics and science skills are among the problems discussed. The characteristics of effectively integrated schools are examined in light of changes in urban demography. The impact of Project Head Start competency-based education, and teacher improvement programs are also discussed. Fiscal problems, policy implications, and various school finance reform measures are outlined. (JCD)

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MAKING THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS WORK Urban Education in the '80s

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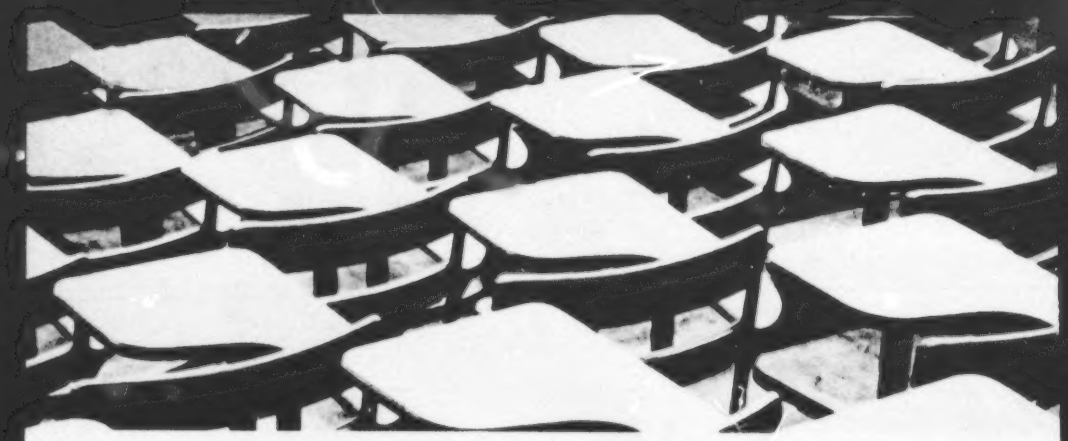

MAKING THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS WORK

Urban Education in the '80s • by Angelo John Lewis

FOCUS 9 • 1982 • Educational Testing Service

Editor • Albert Benderson

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Each issue of FOCUS discusses a critical aspect of education today and the work Educational Testing Service is doing to help cope with it. Most widely known for standardized tests, ETS is also the nation's largest nonprofit educational research organization.

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Introduction

During the past year many prominent popular magazines have featured stories bemoaning the alleged decline in the quality of public school education—particularly in urban areas. Educators, however, recognizing that the decline is not universal, are trying to determine what makes the most successful urban schools effective in order to reshape programs at schools that perform poorly.

James Coleman's recent, highly publicized study, *Public and Private Schools*, for example, suggested that effective schools in both sectors had certain common characteristics, such as an orderly environment and a demanding academic program. In the fall 1981 issue of *Daedalus*, devoted almost exclusively to an examination of three exemplary high schools, Philip W. Jackson seems to support Coleman's findings when he argues that all students are capable of doing far more than is ever demanded of them and questions whether "more grey matter is required to study high-school biology or chemistry than to master the details of bookkeeping or to dismantle and rebuild a car engine."

What is frequently obscured by these calls for a more rigorous curriculum, however justified, are the very real advances that have occurred within the last several decades. For example, the proportion of 17-year-olds who graduated from high school has grown from about 50 percent in 1940 to about 85 percent in the late '70s—with nearly half of these students going on to college. And Project Head Start, perhaps the major educational experiment of the 1960s, has been found to be successful in its goal of giving disadvantaged children some of the "head start" affluent children get.

But for all the progress that has been made, there is no denying that public education—especially in the cities—is in deep trouble. With the push for tuition tax credits gathering steam and federal and

state support for urban schools declining annually, it's difficult to fault the conclusion of Gerald Moeller, the assistant superintendent of the Kansas City public schools: "It's a pretty troubled time right now. It's just not the day for a big urban district."

Public Education's Laundry List

Here are some of the challenges facing today's urban schools:

- The White House is cutting federal funds to elementary and secondary schools by 25 percent and making even larger cuts in the school lunch program. Although the federal government provides only 8 percent of the total dollars that go to schools, the federal cuts are in addition to 25 percent across-the-board cuts of all other federal monies earmarked for states. Analysts say when states are forced to choose among priorities for federal spending, the big losers are likely to be the cities and the biggest losers are likely to be the schools.
- Half the school-age children in Boston, Buffalo, Providence, Memphis, and New Orleans now attend private schools. Half of all public school parents say they have considered sending their children to private schools.
- A 1980 National Education Association (NEA) survey found that 41 percent of teachers polled said they would choose another profession if they had the chance.
- A recent Gallup poll found that half of all Americans believe the

public schools are doing a poor or only fair job; 59 percent believe teachers should be better trained; more than 60 percent want their children raised in a more orderly atmosphere.

- Every day, one out of every 15 students is absent from public school. According to *The New York Times*, one of every four students who start public high school does not finish. A high proportion of these are urban students.
- Many educators believe America's students have deficient science and mathematics skills. Two-thirds of the public school districts require only a year of math or science. Only 31 percent of public high schools offer calculus, a mandatory subject in the Soviet Union, and less than seven percent of graduating secondary school students have taken it.

Although the litany is long, it is useful to keep in mind the simple truism that problems in urban schools are microcosmic reflections of the problems of American society. And it is necessary to remember that there *are* urban schools that work and people within all schools who are working to make them better. These people—teachers, administrators, researchers, and students—and their concerns are the subject of this report.

Educating the Disadvantaged

The changes in urban demographics since World War II have had a critical impact on public education. Call it "White flight" or "suburbanization," attribute it to busing for racial equality or the natural attraction of the upper middle class to the suburbs: the result is the same. Most big city school districts are more than 60 percent Black and Hispanic. A majority of the students are disadvantaged, an increase from 10 percent in 1950.

The effects of "White flight" and the consequent socioeconomic segregation of urban schools have been dramatic. City schools now need expensive programs for the disadvantaged and bilingual that voters seem increasingly disinclined to support. "Economically, when Whites left, they took a lot of the money with them," said Trenton school administrator Delba Brilliantine. "They took their kids out of public schools and into private schools. Many just weren't interested when it came time for budgets to be passed."

Court-ordered desegregation and busing to ensure racial equality have accelerated the flight of Whites and the middle class from

the public schools. In 1954, the year of the Supreme Court's school-desegregation ruling, all but one of the nation's 20 largest cities had White majorities in the schools. Today, 17 of the top 20 have non-White majorities.

Busing has been responsible for doubling and tripling the enrollments of some independent and church-affiliated schools. In some cities, too, busing has all but destroyed the concept of the neighborhood school, a factor that has significantly affected the role of the schools as traditional neighborhood political bases.

But despite the brouhaha over busing, federal law has fostered some integrated public schools that are functioning effectively. For example, by the creative use of "magnet" or "specialty" schools, Milwaukee managed to desegregate most of its schools through largely voluntary means. Students can sign up for any of the system's 143 schools—specializing in such areas as creative arts, the Montessori method, college preparation, and vocational education. "Not only are White students bused in, but Blacks as well," Deputy Superintendent David A. Bennett was quoted as saying. "People are shopping for schools in Milwaukee. They want to see your test scores and how you compare with other schools."

Characteristics of Effectively Integrated Schools

In 1973, a team of Educational Testing Service (ETS) researchers headed by Garlie Forehand set out to determine what conditions and practices are found in successfully integrated public schools. Forehand and his colleagues started from the premise that integration is desirable and essential. After collecting data by way of tests, questionnaires, and interviews in nearly 200 racially mixed schools,

the researchers described their findings in the *Handbook for Integrated Schooling*, published by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare in July 1976.

They found a high correlation between the racial attitudes of principals and teachers and the racial attitudes of students. Successfully integrated schools were characterized by balanced minority representation on faculty and administrative staff, multiethnic curricula, and the active promotion of interracial contact through multicultural studies and extracurricular activities. "There's been great acceptance of the handbook by the public schools," Forehand said recently, "and at least one school system has used the study as a basis for assessing its practices and evaluating its programs."

Despite the recent deemphasis on busing as a means to attain racial equality, Forehand believes that integration will remain the priority of some urban schools—especially in the increasingly Hispanic Southwest. But Robert L. Jackson II, director of ETS's Office for Minority Education (OME), says that integrated education has become a secondary issue to some minority educators. "History has now created an attitude among a number of minority educators that integration was merely a means of insuring quality education for minority students. If it hasn't brought us any closer to that objective, perhaps it has no inherent value."

Jackson and his staff are particularly concerned with reshaping educational practices to overcome the effects of racial discrimination. In its five-year history, OME has designed and implemented a number of services to assist minorities in successfully negotiating such traditional educational milestones as test performance, high school graduation, employment, and university admissions. OME personnel are frequently called in as "trouble shooters" to predomi-

nantly Black or integrated school districts and colleges that wish to develop effective integration strategies or decrease attrition, a serious problem for Black colleges.

Project Head Start

Much of what is known about the factors that affect disadvantaged learners stems from the enormous body of research that accompanied the development and subsequent evaluation of Project Head Start. Early in 1965, child-development experts drafted a proposal for federally financed preschool centers as part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's "War on Poverty." Controversial since its inception, Head Start in its heyday served more than 500,000 children in 25,000 communities.

For four years, the program was considered a cornerstone of the Johnson administration's plan to shortcircuit the "poverty cycle." But the strategy ran into serious difficulty in 1969 when an evaluation by the Westinghouse Learning Corporation concluded that Head Start had little lasting effect on the learning ability of children.

But recent research, conducted by the Consortium for Longitudinal Studies and published by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, all but reverses the Westinghouse conclusions. When

children who had been in the Head Start program were compared with nonparticipating children of similar socioeconomic backgrounds, researchers found:

- Head Start children were less likely to require placement in special remedial classes.
- Head Start children were less likely to be retained in grade.
- Head Start children scored significantly better in mathematics achievement tests.

The ETS-Head Start Longitudinal Study

"Head Start," said Dr. Virginia Shipman, director of the ETS-Head Start Longitudinal Study, "is the strongest indication of the War on Poverty having effect. It showed the importance of a broad base of citizenry being involved in their community's education."

The longitudinal study was a five-year project that analyzed the physical, personal-social, and cognitive development of disadvantaged Black and White English-speaking children beginning at age 3½ to 4½ and continuing to age 8½ to 9½. Its principal aim was to identify the components of early education related to child development, to measure the influence of environmental factors on these components, and to describe how these influences operate.

Among the major findings were:

- The so-called "culture of poverty" is a myth. Children in low-income groups, whether White or Black, are not homogeneous, nor are their families.
- Commonly used indicators of socioeconomic status, such as parental occupation and education level, are inappropriate gauges of the child's environment. Within a socioeconomic level, the range of home environments can be so wide that uniformity cannot be assumed.
- A warm, supportive home atmosphere combined with a warm, supportive school setting maximizes a child's chances of achieving.
- Mothers of children from Head Start were more likely to continue their education than mothers of children of the same background who did not participate in the program.

"The usual finding of the many studies assessing disadvantaged

children is that when parents are actively involved in the school, their kids perform better. This appears to be true across socioeconomic groups," Shipman said.

Shipman's study has made a major contribution to measurement by developing instruments used in several national evaluations, including Head Start and Follow Through, and in CIRCUS—an ETS test battery for diagnosing the learning needs of pupils from preschool into third grade.

Educational Accountability

Project Head Start was one of a number of social programs implemented in the mid-1960s that were aimed at providing services to needy students. But after the mid-'60s, the aims of social policy began to change. As Huron Institute researchers David K. Cohen and Walt Haney once wrote: "The connection between providing resources and producing results . . . (became) more uncertain . . . . Productivity quickly became a central concern in many sectors of social

policy, as attention shifted to the results of investment in the common welfare."

Research released during this period shocked the educational community by finding that differences in school resources and facilities were unrelated to differences in school outcomes. The next step, according to Cohen and Haney, seemed inevitable: "If adding resources didn't add to results, then perhaps the way to get results was to somehow insist on them."

It was in this climate that the educational accountability movement, with its emphasis on basic skills and minimum competency testing for students, was born.

Competency-based Education

By the mid-'70s, competency-based education had captured the imagination of many urban educators. Interest in basic skills testing—although criticized by some—was widespread. For example, a 1976 joint task force of the National Association for Secondary School Principals and the U.S. Office of Education called for adoption of competence requirements in communication skills, mathematics, and American history as a condition of receiving a high school diploma. A National School Boards Association survey published prior to the NASSP-USOE conference said that more than three-quarters of board members polled believed schools should put more time and effort into reading, writing, and mathematics skills.

Responding to these concerns, ETS in 1976 worked with a consortium of 300 school districts to develop a series of tests to measure ability in reading, writing, and mathematics. Designed for use in secondary schools, the Basic Skills Assessment tests were intended to serve primarily as an early warning system, identifying student learning needs in the eighth or ninth grade. Administered in 1977 to more than 70,000 students in 200 districts, the tests were also used to monitor student progress toward mastery of the basic skills throughout high school and to determine minimum graduation standards.

By 1978, the Basic Skills Assessment tests—now published by the Addison-Wesley Publishing Company—were among a number of basic skills test batteries being used. Many states developed their own tests, and the movement toward minimum competency testing became the rule rather than the exception across the nation. Perhaps the most stringent of test-based competency programs is a new one in New York City that denies promotion to pupils with reading deficiencies.

Competency Testing's Critics

Fremer

Not everybody is happy with the public schools' increased emphasis on basic skills and minimum competency testing. The powerful National Education Association (NEA), the largest teachers' organization and a staunch critic of standardized tests, says that the tests don't measure the skills schools teach and are inherently biased in favor of White middle-class values. Northwestern University sociologist Christopher Jencks, while differing with the NEA, is one of a number of critics who believe that basic skills are *not* declining. The real trouble, says Jencks, is at the secondary school level and involves complex analytical skills, such as reading comprehension, rather than basic skills.

ETS's John Fremer, one of the developers of the Basic Skills Assessment tests, says that one way advocates and critics of competency-based testing for students may be reconciled is to provide students a nontest-based option to demonstrate mastery of basic skills.

Testing Teacher Competence

Far more controversial than competency testing for students are efforts to measure teacher competence. OME's Robert Jackson believes this is ironic: "Why is it only now, when (teacher) union members are a target of tests, that we are finally finding concern being expressed. Why weren't we worried about the appropriate use of testing when it focused on kids? . . . The militancy with respect to testing has been a function of protecting union members."

The two major teachers' organizations have differing stands. The NEA opposes any kind of testing as a condition of certification

Jackson

or continued employment, citing technical reservations about all standardized tests. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) opposes testing employed teachers, but supports certification tests. "It won't tell you if a person is going to be a good teacher," says AFT President Albert Shanker, "but it will tell you pretty quickly if they're illiterate."

The National Teacher Examinations

The first and still most widely used tests of teachers are the National Teacher Examinations (NTE). Developed by the Association of Teacher Educators in the late 1930s at the request of superintendents of major school districts across the country, the NTE was turned over to ETS in 1950. In 1979, ETS delegated policy direction to the NTE Policy Council, an external body of 12 individuals representing each user group.

Masonis

The primary function of the NTE is to provide objective, standardized measures of the knowledge and skills developed in teacher training programs. These measures enable state departments of education, school systems, and others to compare the qualifications of candidates from different colleges that may have dissimilar standards and grading practices.

In 1971, ETS developed guidelines clarifying the appropriate use of the tests. They specify that the NTE should not be used to determine teacher retention, tenure, or status; should not be used for establishing salary; and should not be used as the sole basis for evaluating the educational impact of a teacher education program upon its students. In court proceedings in Mississippi and South Carolina, ETS staff members have testified against inappropriate use of the tests for teacher selection, retention, and evaluation, and for setting salaries.

Edward Masonis, administrator of teacher programs and services, has stressed that the test should not be used as an indicator of teacher effectiveness. "As far as I know, there is no such thing as a test of teacher aptitude or potential, and I know of no test, including

NTE, that proports to measure teacher effectiveness. One problem in judging is that there is no general agreement about what an effective teacher is. The number of definitions is about equal to the number of professional educators."

The growing nationwide interest in minimum competency testing for teachers—at this writing, for example, Florida, Georgia, and Virginia are developing their own teacher certification tests—is but one of a number of signs that the American public is dissatisfied with the performance of teachers. Nearly 90 percent of the respondents in a recent national poll said they thought teachers should be required to pass a competency test before they are hired. Some professional educators, including Graham Down of the Council of Basic Education, say that the majority of teachers are only marginally competent.

Although the preparation of teachers, as measured by degrees and years of schooling, is more extensive than ever, standards for admission into educational programs have plummeted. Because enrollment in educational programs has fallen by half since 1973, some colleges and universities have had to lower their entrance critera merely to stay in business. As a result, SAT scores of 1980 high-school seniors who planned to major in education were 48 points below the national average in math and 35 points below in the verbal component.

But even such critics as Down concede that teachers are frequently the scapegoats of a system that has downgraded the profession's status. "Teachers are getting a raw deal," says Down, "because their salaries are not keeping up with the cost of living. The general lack of support for the public schools has led to a demoralized outlook on life."

Teachers Do Make a Difference

Research indicates that teachers—far more than curricula—determine the degree of learning. According to Virginia Shipman, "Educators make a major mistake when they develop a prepackaged curriculum that makes teachers less important. Teachers are never less important. Teachers can destroy a prepackaged curriculum."

The finding that teachers make a significant contribution to learning—despite the powerful influences of home and community—was the major result of an ETS study of the effectiveness of teaching

conducted for the California Commission for Teacher Preparation and Licensing.

In that study, conducted under a grant from the National Institute of Education, senior research scientist Frederick J. McDonald surveyed the teaching practices of 95 second- and fifth-grade teachers at 43 elementary schools in eight California school districts.

The study identified large numbers of children with low initial scores in reading and mathematics who made considerable progress during the school year—much more progress than would have been expected on the basis of their first test scores. Although McDonald found that no single teaching skill was uniformly effective in second- and fifth-grade instruction in mathematics and reading, he also found that classroom organizational structures that provided for direct teacher instruction and direct interaction between teacher and pupil increased chances that learning would be improved.

The Teacher Centers Movement

"Teaching is one of the few professions where you don't go back regularly to upgrade your skills. Laws are passed, politicians come into it, parents, at least hopefully, come into it . . . everybody is coming in to say what education should be. But very rarely are the people who are dishing out the education asked if these things will work," said Joy Collins, a teacher center specialist in a New York City public school.

This perspective is shared by many of her colleagues. Teachers frequently feel their needs are ignored by politicians and administrators who, they say, dictate the subjects they teach and the way they should teach them. They feel underappreciated by a society that howls for accountability at the same time it demands that they virtually raise children. "Teachers feel terribly put on by society," said McDonald, staff researcher for the New York City Teacher Centers Consortium.

In 1976, the NEA and the AFT won passage of federal legislation to fund teacher centers: inservice training efforts for the most part staffed by teachers themselves. Under the law, school districts or colleges of education apply for the grants and sponsor local centers, but center policy boards must have teacher majorities.

In New York City, the school administration joined forces with the teachers' union and landed the largest federal grant. The result was the New York City Teacher Centers Consortium, which, with 10

centers throughout the city, makes programs and services available to more than 80,000 public school teachers and other personnel.

Central to the work of the centers are teaching specialists, who work with teachers during the school day helping them improve classroom management skills, teach basic skills, and develop instructional strategies.

McDonald said the key to the program's success is that it's run by and for teachers, with the support, but without the political interference, of school administrators. "Teachers are looking for ways to participate in decision-making about their schools. Teacher centers could be an antidote to teacher burnout."

Solving the Money Problem

Decisions as to instructional strategies, student-teacher ratios, and classroom materials depend on the availability of money, a commodity that's growing increasingly scarce in urban public schools.

In Philadelphia this year, the city council's decision to fund only $701 million—$201 million less than the $902 million the school board requested—meant layoffs of 3,500 teachers and teacher aides and a bitter teachers' strike. In Boston last year, only complex fiscal juggling prevented the nearly bankrupt city school district from shutting down months before the scheduled end of the school year. In

Goertz

the recent past, fiscal crises have forced New York, Chicago, and Cleveland to cut back services to children. Analysts say that most large urban school systems currently face the possibility of fiscal crises in which they can neither raise enough taxes nor borrow money on their own good names.

The fiscal problems facing urban schools, said Margaret E. Goertz of ETS' Education Policy Research Institute (EPRI), are fourfold:

- Cities have a resource base that is insufficient to meet increasing educational costs.
- Education costs are greater in the cities due to the large number of students requiring special services and to higher prices paid for all goods and services.
- The great demand for noneducation services in cities places a disproportionate burden on the urban tax dollar.
- State aid formulas are generally insensitive to these problems and therefore fail to compensate for the unique fiscal disadvantages of large urban districts.

The School Finance Reform Movement

These urban fiscal problems have led to a school finance reform movement embodied in two court cases: the *Serrano v. Priest* decision of 1970 and the *Levittown v. Nyquist* decision of 1978.

In 1970, the parents of John Serrano, a pupil in one of California's poorer districts, filed a class-action suit challenging the state's school financing system. A year later, the state supreme court ruled that the system, with its heavy reliance on local property taxes, had denied John Serrano equal protection under the law. Facing similar court orders, or hoping to forestall judicial intervention, nearly half of the 50 states have changed their school financing systems since Serrano.

In 1978, Levittown and 26 other low-property-wealth school districts (including New York City) filed suit claiming that New York State's school finance system failed to equalize the ability of districts to spend for education. The court responded by invalidating the state's system. The ruling was upheld on appeal, and the state has now appealed to a higher court. The case is the first to focus on the specific problems of urban school districts.

Education Policy Research Institute

"The biggest problem facing urban districts is the high level of educational needs, particularly by impoverished students requiring extra educational services. Basically, the educational system is designed to deal with normal kids. City school districts are asked to develop new programs when they don't have money to do it," said Goertz.

Goertz and other EPRI staff members, at offices in Princeton and Washington, D.C., study policy issues related to education at the federal, state, and local levels. They explore the real or potential impact of different courses of action and make recommendations that are consonant with two principles—equal educational opportunity and equitable distribution of tax dollars.

As a result of the Levittown vs. Nyquist decision, EPRI staff are assisting the New York City Board of Education as it seeks ways to maximize possible new opportunites for increased state aid. To aid in this task, EPRI is utilizing the ETS-developed computer software School Finance Equalization Management System (SFEMS), which was recently rated by a group of users as the best of its type.

"SFEMS gives us a very important tool that makes it possible for

us to make our own responses to the computer data the state feeds out," said Joan Scheuer, head of the revenue monitoring unit of the New York City public schools.

Kansas City and St. Louis

EPRI is also using SFEMS in its National Institute of Education-funded collaborative technical assistance effort in the school districts of Kansas City and St. Louis, Missouri.

The problems confronting the "show me" state's two largest school districts illustrate the perplexities confronting urban school districts across the country.

Both are predominantly minority districts that once were overwhelmingly White. Each school district has lost enrollment at an average rate of more than four percent a year, with no end in sight. Educational costs are well above average in both communities, and both have found it increasingly difficult to raise revenues. Both school districts have, therefore, become more and more dependent on state and federal funding.

Despite their apparent similarities, the school districts had frequently been adversaries when it came time to plead their separate cases before the rural-dominated state legislature. "Many years ago, Kansas City was substantially affluent. We really didn't need to work with other people," explained Gerald Moeller, assistant superintendent of the Kansas City public school system. "But in the last few years, we've fallen on stringent times and have been looking around for allies. We found that most of our allies are in the St. Louis area."

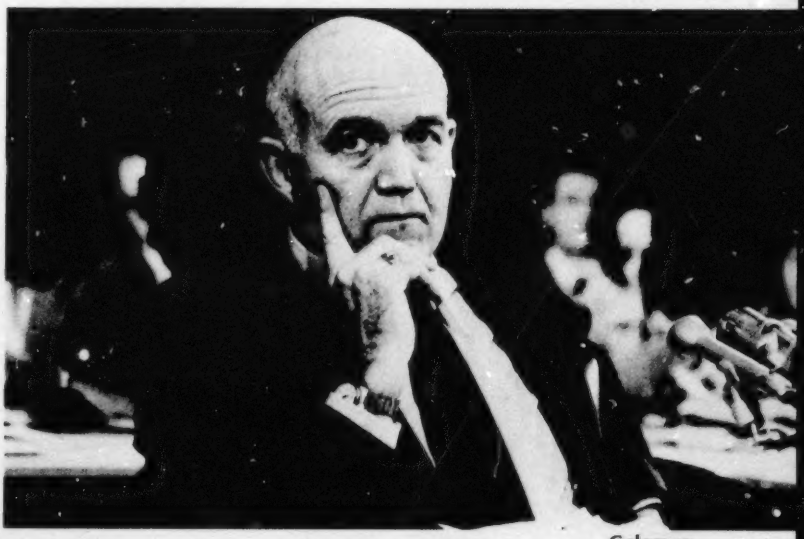
EPRI has been working with the two districts to help them clarify their common interests. It also plans to compose materials for use in an urban educators' guidebook on the structure and politics of the state school financial policy process, and to develop training modules to improve the capacity of urban school systems to identify and analyze finance issues.

The Politics of Education

School finance reform—indeed, all educational reform—inevitably involves politics, says the AFT's James Ward. "The first problem is defining equity. Then you have to adjust for the political factor. No matter how you define it, all decisions in school funding are basically political decisions."

Ward's point of view is shared by educators of all political stripes. There is no way, many educators feel, that nearly half of the states would have changed their school financing laws were it not for the pressure they felt from the courts; no way schools would have desegregated were it not for the political activity of civil rights groups; no way busing would have been deemphasized by the federal government were it not for the political fervor of busing's opponents.

Furthermore, many believe, academicians in general and sociologists in particular are frequently the puppets politicians use to promote policies that might in the final analysis prove unsound. Editorialized *The New York Times* in response to Coleman's *Public and Private Schools* study: "Politicians use sociologists in much the same way as trial lawyers use psychologists: to prove their point with expert testimony that best serves their purpose. The goal thereforc is to find the expert who comes up with the desired findings."



Coleman

Coleman Revisted

The *Times* was but one of a chorus of critics of Coleman's new study, which found, among other things, that schools that put academic pressure on students achieve better results and that private schools do this more frequently than do public schools. The critics were

Hilton

especially agitated by Coleman's most controversial findings: first, that a tuition tax credit or voucher would increase the private school enrollment of Blacks and Hispanics more than that of Whites; second, that Catholic schools today "more nearly approximate the 'common school' ideal of American education than do public schools; and third, that the achievement levels of students from different parental educational backgrounds and ethnic groups, are more nearly alike in Catholic schools than in public schools."

The study's admirers and detractors gave it special significance because of the impact of the first major Coleman study, *Equality of Educational Opportunity*. Said ETS research scientist Thomas L. Hilton: "The first report had enormous impact on public education. It provided the major basis for busing in this country and for integration." Hilton and others believe the new study shows signs of becoming a popular rationale for the tuition tax credit movement.

Coleman's detractors didn't waste any time putting on the gloves after the second study was released. The NEA called the report "irresponsible public policy research" and questioned it's integrity because of Coleman's support for tuition tax credits.

But the blow that made the biggest impact—at least in educational circles—was the release of a nationwide study by the respected National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) that appeared to contradict Coleman's findings. The NAEP concluded that when populations were equated so that public and private schools shared equal proportions of students from various socioeconomic levels, the difference between public and private school student performance diminished considerably or vanished.

Hilton questions the findings of the Coleman report on tech-

nical grounds. According to Hilton, the scores Coleman used in support of his finding that cognitive gains were greater in private than in public schools were on tests designed to measure aptitude and not achievement. Hilton also questions the statistical methods Coleman used to adjust for the difference in economic background between public and private school students.

The Lerner Voucher Plan

Coleman's support for the tuition tax credit or voucher alternative is shared—with a twist—by civil rights activist turned educational consultant Barbara Lerner.

Lerner believes that students who do not meet minimum competency standards in the public schools should be sent to private schools for three years at public expense. Under the plan, the parents or guardian of these students could choose to transfer them to private schools.

Public funds that would support the child in the public schools could be transferred to an accredited private school to pay the student's tuition. For those who did not improve after three years, Lerner suggests creating "national schools" where students would be brought together in regional institutions for special instruction.

Lerner, a clinical psychologist and attorney, developed the voucher plan during a one-year stint as the first visiting scholar for measurement and public policy at ETS. "It seems fair to conclude that the plan suggested poses no real threat to the legitimate aims of the proponents of public schools," Lerner has said. She does, however, believe that private schools have "considerable advantages that seem to accrue to all human institutions and associations formed on the basis of mutual choice rather than coercion."

Making the Public Schools Work

Although many feel that tuition tax credits would drive the best and brightest of public school students to private schools, Salt Lake City Superintendent of Schools M. Donald Thomas says urban schools can reverse the defection.

Thomas' solution is called "school governance." By getting parents involved in the decision-making apparatus of the schools, Thomas and Salt Lake City have apparently solved many of the prob-

lems that cause parents to take their children out of public schools. The result: Salt Lake City has reclaimed 60 percent of the students who had defected to nearby private schools; average school attendance has increased to 96 percent; 40 teachers—and three principals—have been fired for incompetence with the union's consent.

Salt Lake City installed the system for a mere $50,000 a year. What was difficult was changing educators' attitudes about the role of parents in the schools. "I had to talk like a Dutch uncle," Thomas said.

Thomas' recipe goes like this: There are 45 parent councils, one in each of the district's schools, each consisting of eight parents and eight educators. The groups, trained in school governance, are the principal policy-making bodies of the schools within the limits of school board policy, state and federal law, and budgetary constraints.

"We've reestablished confidence in the public schools," Thomas said.

Technology and Education

ETS Assistant Vice President for Research and Development Administration Ernest J. Anastasio believes the sound application of educational technology is one answer to urban school problems.

"I think we have evidence that technology can help us a lot. We can go back a decade or so to the *Sesame Street* and *Electric Company* television programs. They didn't solve all the problems they set out to solve, but they nonetheless showed that carefully designed and implemented curriculum could be transmitted through a medium other than a teacher and quite reasonable progress could be made by kids exposed to that curriculum on a regular basis."

Anastasio's view is supported by an ETS four-year longitudinal study of computer-assisted instruction (CAI) in Los Angeles elementary schools, funded by the National Institute of Education.

ETS research psychologist Marjorie Ragosta and statistician Paul Holland, working with World Bank economist Dean Jamison, assessed the effect of using computers for drill and practice in math, reading, and the language arts—grammar, spelling, and punctuation. The main objective was to appraise CAI as a remedial tool for students who are not doing well in school, by giving them extra drill in the basic skills. Many of the students were Black and Hispanic and came from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The results for students exposed to CAI less than a half-hour

each day? "We're finding that CAI—especially the math curriculum—is increasing student test scores. Reading and language scores also improve. There is slight evidence that programs in reading comprehension may help comprehension scores, but we have no significant findings," Ragosta said.

"I started off this project wondering, 'Why plug these poor little kids into a computer?' Then I saw how kids liked the computer, how well they behaved in the computer room compared to other places in the school. The CAI lab was a place where work got done."

Despite the success of the CAI project, Ragosta believes there are a number of obstacles that prevent CAI from being introduced in urban schools. Among them are the start-up costs fiscally minded administrators associate with CAI. Another is a widespread attitude among teachers that CAI would add unwanted complexity to established instructional routines or even threaten jobs.

Hope for the Schools

There are urban schools that are working—and working well. There's no magic formula, no common denominator. Some are using CAI, others have "gone basic," still others have "gone magnet." Here's a quick look around the country at places where the public schools have won the public's confidence:

- Little Rock's Central High School was shut down nearly 25 years ago by Gov. Orval Faubus in a last-ditch effort to thwart integration. Today, it's widely regarded as one of the best public high schools in the country. SAT scores are 46 points above the national average. Sixty-five percent of the seniors go on to college, and 57 percent of the student body is Black. The school has an array of programs that would be the envy of any private school. A demanding curriculum and a tough-minded disciplinary policy appear to have made the difference.
- The Beasley Academic Center on the South Side of Chicago is a back-to-basics grade school in the Windy City's most crime-ridden district. Its success was largely the fruit of Alice C. Blair's labor. (Blair is now Chicago's deputy superintendent of instruction and pupil services.) Children have to pass an entrance examination to get in, and those who don't succeed can be kicked out. About two-thirds of the students come from low-income Black families, although children from 70 other public schools and 45 parochial schools across the city have transferred in. "I

have never considered myself a liberal," one white parent was quoted as saying. "But when it comes to my children, I want the best, and that's Beasley."

- By setting up a citywide system of magnet schools, Milwaukee desegregated its schools through largely voluntary means. Some 120 of 143 public schools now meet federal desegregation criteria, compared with only 12 in 1976. "We are probably the most racially balanced urban school system in the North, and 98 percent of it was accomplished by voluntary movement," said Deputy Superintendent David A. Bennett.

The Future of Urban Schools

What, then, are the prospects for urban schools?

Will they, as former Boston superintendent Robert Wood believes, evolve towards a caretaker/custodial role, a kind of educator-of-the-last-resort for poor children and others with special needs?

Or will the leaders of the "effective school movement," such as Ronald Edmunds, professor of education at Michigan State University, manage to dispel the myth that inner-city schools cannot overcome deficits in family background unless socioeconomic conditions are improved?

Philip W. Jackson, in *Daedalus*, suggests that we know how to improve comprehensive urban schools and that it is absolutely vital that we find the will to act upon this knowledge. "The process of overcoming long-standing prejudices and of advancing mutual understanding among various social groups may be painfully slow and may even suffer temporary setbacks, but can we doubt that comprehensive schools are advantageously placed to play a role in the attainment of such goals? They may not be as successful in this regard as we would like them to be, but the thought of not having them at all and the prospect of giving them up as an experiment that failed are not very pleasant ideas to contemplate."

". . . Good schools, unlike the manufacturers of perfumes and other exotic concoctions, have few, if any, secrets to di vulge. What their teachers and administrators know about how to educate, most other educators know as well. The determination to act on that knowledge is another matter entirely."

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